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## CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

A radio talk by Ella Gardner, Extension Service, broadcast Thursday, December 10, 1936, in the home demonstration program, National Farm and Home Hour, by 53 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

"It isn't the gift and it isn't the feast;  
Of all of the miracles these are the least.  
It is the good that flows from the hearts of men  
When Christmas love is abroad again."

In this delightful way Angela Morgan describes the best part of Christmas. All of us agree that beauty, simplicity, happiness -- the "good that flows from the hearts of men", permeating the doings of every magical day are the real essence of Christmas, yet many of us let the rush and pressure of gifts and guests and meals rob us and our families of the best of Christmas cheer.

I am sure that you will read and hear much of how to make gifts, select toys, cook the turkey and season the mince pie. I want to take a few minutes, therefore, to talk about keeping Christmas.

What makes Christmas? If you really want to know, examine your own happiest Christmas memories and inquire into those of your friends. Now and then a highly prized gift will be mentioned but usually it's the frolic, - the togetherness of the family celebration that will stand out most clearly.

One summer in a homemakers' camp in the West, we fell to discussing happy childhood memories and a woman said, "The gayest time I remember was our Christmas on the Shoe String. That's a little creek but it could also mean the amount of money we had to spend. That was a sure enough hand-made Christmas." She told us of the toys that the parents and older children contrived from scraps and of the atmosphere of celebration that their united efforts and thoughts brought to a sod house on the prairies. Their fun centered around a bush trimmed with fantastic figures cut from pumpkin rind and generously hung with cookies made of corn meal, pumpkin, and molasses.

The fact that the whole family schemed and worked at it was a big part of the success, of course. I remember with great satisfaction the Christmas trees of my childhood. They probably were not beautiful at all by the standards of these days but to us children the paper rings and popcorn strings that had filled the snowy and rainy afternoons of the weeks before Christmas made a tree that the most gifted designer could not surpass.

A woman once told me of a lovely custom her family follows. On Christmas eve special candles are lighted. As each person lights his, he makes a wish to everyone else. This means that one must pay close attention to the family's intangible needs. It also allows for considerable extravagance -- offering small brother an opportunity to wish for a new automobile for dad,

for instance. The person who told me of this said her greatest satisfaction came the year she first wrote a verse for each one.

The fact that every member of the family from the oldest to the youngest has a responsible part in making Christmas is much of the magic. There is even more in the feeling of belonging to a long line of good people who have kept this "joyful'st feast" for years and years before you.

Henry Seidel Canby gives us this sense of timelessness in his glimpse of Christmas of the 90's. He says, "Dusk, and the family gather in the living room, no lights but candles, doughnuts and coffee instead of supper, quiet voices telling old stories of times before you were born -- a sense of the past recurring, a continuity from Christmas to Christmas, a stream of life of which you are a part and exquisitely aware of the current of human experience."

Several years ago after a broadcast similar to this, I received a delightful letter describing a New England Christmas enjoyed by a family and their friends, -- the sharing of their Christmas tree and gifts, the afternoon on sleds, bobs, jumpers, and home-made skis, the evening before the fire when stories were told of the first and other Christmases. "It was all so simple -- so homely -- so genuine," the letter ends, "We have the true richness of life to recall, \*\*\*."

Carol singing each evening during the week before Christmas is the custom in another family. Carol time has grown to hold stories and tales of Christmas customs around the world as well as carols and rounds, "the very best part of Christmas," the teen-age daughter says. "Christmas Traditions," a book by W. M. Auld, offers interesting material for such an hour.

You, too, probably have traditions that have come to be a part of your celebration. If so I know they help you to find for yourself and your family the Christmas that Shakespeare described when he said:

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,  
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;  
And then, they say, no spirit dare to stir abroad;  
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,  
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."

May I wish for you a hallowed and gracious time, a Christmas that you may remember long and happily!

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